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ABSTRACT

The skills needed by the principal for developing and maintaining good school/community relations are synthesized from recent research and presented in this brief document. These universal concepts are applicable to both large and small schools. The topics included are the principal's responsibility to the community, necessary political skills, common problems and expected roles of parents and citizens. Ideas for increasing community involvement, a checklist for assessing school-community relations and references are included. (JW)

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THE SMALL SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Small Schools Fact Sheet

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SMALL SCHOOLS

FACT SHEET

THE SMALL SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

What are the organizational goals for good school community-relations?

In describing organizations, Blake and Mouton (1974) state that there are three characteristics that seem to be universal: purpose, people and power. Effective management of these universals is the condition of efficiently arriving at one's goals through sound organization.

Purpose: The manager, or principal, needs to identify the community's assumptions regarding the purposes of education in general, and, specifically what are the purposes of relating with the community. For example, the principal needs to determine the identification of the community for purposes of specific interactions as, in some cases, it is desirable to go beyond the local community to the state, region, nation, or foreign nation as one's domain of interaction.

People: As modern transportation and communication have urbanized outlying areas, the traditional rural-urban differences have diminished. (Bernard, 1973) As a result, the principal may not necessarily be able to presume as high a level or the same type of community interest and support that may have been typical in the past.

Power Hierarchy: To avoid misunderstandings, the major assumptions of how, and by whom, decisions are made regarding community relations should be made clear, so that those involved may know both what is permitted and what is expected of them.

How are principals responsible to the community?

Principals are responsible to the community at large in many ways, such as: (1) interpreting the school programs to the community; (2) determining community expectations of the school; (3) communicating with parents through the media and in group conferences; (4) having parents visit the school; (5) working with parent associations and related groups; (6) interacting with school critics; (7) planning and coordinating the visits of school people to homes of students; (8) initiating special publicity campaigns; (9) supporting student publications; (10) appraising school-community relations; (11) working with industry and community image groups; (12) determining the community power structure. (Wilson & Stansberry, 1976)

What roles do parents and citizens play in the operation of a school?

In a recent survey by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (Byrne, Hines, & McCleary, 1978), principals indicated two major areas in which parents and citizens were involved: in a planning-advisory capacity, and in the regular operation of the school. The survey population included secondary and elementary urban and rural principals.

In order of involvement, the "planning-advisory" areas of community involvement were: student activities, the setting of objectives, and priorities for the school, finance and fund-raising, program changes, student behavior, and program evaluation.

The "operation of the school" area of community involvement included, in order of involvement; resource persons to programs and activities, operators of concessions for the benefit of the school, sponsors or advisors of student groups, supervisors of ticket sellers for student activities, and volunteer tutors.

Principals participate frequently in five types of planned community involvement programs: (1) on-going councils, organizations, and committees; (2) school activities; (3) organized communications such as bulletins, newsletters, surveys, home visits, etc.; (4) speeches given to groups such as service clubs and churches; (5) "drives" and projects. Also, principals who were successful in community relations attempted to be visible and to seek informal ways for meaningful person-to-person contacts. (McCleary & Hines, unpublished)

What political skills should a principal possess?

Successful principals are knowledgeable about the political implications and consequences of citizen involvement in five ways: (1) level of vulnerability; (2) strategies for dealing with power figures; (3) pressure groups; (4) the authority of the principal; (5) understanding the community. (Husen, unpublished)

Another study concludes that: (1) the principal should embody the ethic of a totally responsible public servant; and (2) the principal should ensure community acceptability and organizational stability through a careful monitoring device. (Cusick and Peters, 1978)

What problems and dilemmas are common?

Among the dilemmas that principals have, the following are presented by Hines and McCleary (unpublished): (1) school boards and administrators that are fearful of losing control; (2) others imposing control over the principal's time; (3) the need to be all things to all people; (4) difficulty in defining the principal's role in community involvement, since it is in such a state of flux; (5) a sense that wide disagreement exists about the meaning of community involvement; and (6) the teaching staff and its positions on community involvement.

How can the principal increase community involvement?

Bruner (1981) lists ten ways to get the community to come to the school: (1) simply extend an invitation; (2) make the back-to-school night exciting and productive; (3) set up a community resource file; (4) stage a curriculum fair or exhibit; (5) conduct career days; (6) use parent conferences to explain school programs and to resolve misunderstandings; (7) allow the school building to serve community activities; (8) open discussion (e.g., at a school lunch) between parents and principal; (9) actively recruit community volunteers; (10) send out school newsletters.

How can the principal review school-community relations?

A checklist is provided for principals who would like to review the relations that they have with their communities:

Review board/central administration policies concerning community involvement.

Annual school plan - prioritize improvement efforts with citizen input.

Citizen, faculty, administration team to review community involvement needs; assess linkages to groups that may not be reached.

Parent programs geared to needs of differing student groups, including parenting courses.

Citizen volunteer program.

Senior citizen program.

Student Council projects on community involvement, especially those concerned with homes adjacent to the school, and student projects in the community.

Inform persons living near the school of school events.

Survey parents and citizens.

Informal breakfasts, rap sessions, tours of the school.

Community school for adult education and recreation.

Public relations program coordinated to community needs for information.

Review publication needs and effectiveness of them.

Survey staff memberships in churches, service clubs, etc.

Identify "opinion leaders" through nominations of faculty, citizens' council members, etc.

Identify and make contact with youth-serving groups of the community.

Invite service clubs, ministerial groups, etc., to meet in the school.

Check on mandated councils for compliance, membership, functions.

Review policy regarding student performances and services to community groups.

Review with staff policy for disclosing information and for new releases. (Hines & McCleary, unpublished)

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